



Last Mile Bandwidth Availability

Issue Background

At the 23rd meeting of the President's National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee (NSTAC) in May 2000, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Manager, National Communications System (NCS), addressed the inability of the Nation's military and national security organizations to obtain the timely provisioning of high-bandwidth circuits at the local level, referred to as the "last mile." Subsequently, in an October 2000 letter to the NSTAC Chair, the Manager, NCS, asked the NSTAC to recommend what steps the Government could take to expedite the provisioning of last mile bandwidth or mitigate the provisioning periods for such services altogether.

Recent NSTAC Activities

After coordinating with the Government to scope out key issues, the NSTAC Industry Executive Committee formed the Last Mile Bandwidth Availability Task Force (LMBATF) in January 2001 to examine how the provisioning process is affected by economic and technological factors, recommend how the Government might work with industry to reduce provisioning times or to otherwise mitigate the effects of extended provisioning periods, and to examine what policy-based solutions can be applied to the provisioning of high-bandwidth circuits for national security and emergency preparedness (NS/EP) services. The LMBATF gathered data from both industry organizations and the Federal Government about their experiences with provisioning at the local level and solicited input from telecommunications service providers on the processes for provisioning at the local level and the factors affecting provisioning periods. Based on the information received, the LMBATF limited the scope of its study to non-universally available services throughout the United States, including fiber optics, T1 and T3 lines, integrated services digital network, and digital subscriber line technologies.

Additionally, the task force studied whether the Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP) Program could be used to expedite last mile provisioning requests, because TSP provisioning assignments are used by the NS/EP community to facilitate the expedited installation of telecommunications circuits that otherwise could not be installed within the required time frame. The LMBATF, however, concluded that current TSP provisioning could not be used to replace or transfer existing services or delayed services resulting from inadequate planning or logistical difficulties.

In its March 2002 report, the LMBATF found that the provisioning periods for high-bandwidth services in the last mile are affected by a combination of complex factors: intricate legislative, regulatory, and economic environments; difficult site locations; challenging contracting policies and procedures; and reduced infrastructure investment by telecommunications carriers, to name a few. Ill-timed funding cycles and fragmented management structures also present several obstacles to robust last mile bandwidth availability. Accordingly, the NSTAC made recommendations to address the difficulties associated with last mile bandwidth availability, including the need to reexamine current contract practices between industry and the Government used to implement provisioning services; the establishment of realistic service requirements, timelines, and service options that meet the Government's need for acceptable risk; and increased infrastructure funding for anticipated needs and accelerated installation to meet customer requirements. Industry and the Government continue to work closely to resolve these issues.